

WASHINGTON, D.C. -Six Valley congressmen today released a preliminary federal report that shows an eight-county area of the San Joaquin Valley persistently gets the short end of the federal funding stick.

In a joint press conference via satellite from Washington, D.C., Reps. Devin Nunes, Dennis Cardoza, George Radanovich, and Jim Costa said the Central Valley region ranks below historically impoverished regions around the nation, yet doesn't get the same level of federal investment. Reps. Bill Thomas and Richard Pombo were unable to attend the press event but can be contacted at their offices (their comments can also be found below).

Some of the basic findings include:

Per capita federal direct expenditures and obligations to the San Joaquin Valley were \$4,736 for fiscal year 2002, compared to per capita federal direct expenditures and obligations to the United States were \$6,814 for fiscal year 2002. That means that the San Joaquin Valley got \$2,000 less per capita compared to the national average.

The report also showed that the 2000 poverty rate for the San Joaquin Valley (20.5%) was significantly higher than the national rate (12.4%) and California (14.2%).

The final report, which will pool data from multiple sources and provide relevant analysis, will be released several weeks from now. The preliminary results, while not surprising, do begin to lay a foundation by which the lawmakers can begin to affect budget decisions as Congress enters its appropriations season.

Rep. Bill Thomas

"The data included in the report reflect what many in the Valley suspected: That the Central Valley continues to have many needs, and that we need more federal funding," said Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas, R-Bakersfield. "I will continue to

work with my colleagues to improve the Central Valley's, and California's, share of federal funding."

Rep. Dennis Cardoza

"The Central Valley is being shortchanged by the federal government," said Rep. Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced. "With an exploding population, it's time to pull people together to coordinate a plan of action and make the most of our resources in order to address our problems."

Rep. Richard Pombo

"This study gives us a good baseline assessment and solidifies the case for more funding," said Resources Committee Chairman Richard Pombo, R-Tracy. "More important, we must focus on projects already in the works that will better the lives of the people living in the Central Valley. We must create transportation solutions, which will lead to access to better jobs and improve the overall economy."

Rep. Devin Nunes

"Considering the challenges we face here in the Central Valley with chronic, high unemployment and pervasive poverty, we have been overlooked for federal investment and assistance," said Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Visalia. "I think it is unrealistic to ask for new money to level the playing field. What we need to do is make sure the San Joaquin Valley is getting its fair share of existing federal dollars that are already allocated."

But even as the report details ongoing problems in the eight-county region, the lawmakers have already been involved in efforts to reverse the federal funding trend. Last year, the lawmakers joined forces to strengthen a Clinton-era Executive Order mandating increased federal attention to the Central Valley. The changes to the Executive Order were signed by President George Bush and are being implemented by a federal task force.

The bipartisan group of lawmakers said they will use the information found in the new report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) to leverage even greater help through the task force in the months and years to come.

The lawmakers also laid out an action plan to address issues raised in the report:

The congressmen have requested a meeting with officials at the White House to discuss the report and identify areas of priority.

Utilize the report to advance a bill to include Hwy. 99 in the federal interstate system, which would make it eligible for increased funding.

Each congressman will hold events in their districts to help local governments and agencies improve their efforts to apply for and receive federal grants and contracts.

Rep. Nunes

“Highway 99 is the economic umbilical cord for the Central Valley to the greater commercial centers in northern and southern California,” said Rep. Nunes, who introduced the bill last month. “As a coalition of lawmakers, we can make the improvements needed to ensure the continued growth of industry and jobs here at home.”

Rep. Cardoza

“The Central Valley is growing, but the resources for law enforcement are not,” Rep. Cardoza said. “While we have been successful in obtaining grants and other funding for programs that fight against meth and gangs, more must be done to obtain our fair share of

the federal resources available."

Background

The six lawmakers requested the study in 2004, hoping the information uncovered in it would help leverage the efforts of the federal Interagency Taskforce designated to lend federal assistance to the region.

The CRS report details the current socioeconomic and environmental concerns in the San Joaquin Valley and assesses the role of federal assistance to the cities and counties of the Valley. The final report due out several weeks from now will explore in detail the extent to which the San Joaquin Valley shares similarities with and differences from other economically depressed areas in the United States. Of particular interest is the role of federal assistance in the San Joaquin Valley relative to its role in other economically distinctive areas.

The study's major analytical focus will be the eight counties that largely comprise the Valley (and that represent the six members' Congressional Districts): Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus, San Joaquin and Tulare. The report will also focus on the six metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) of the valley: Fresno, Merced, Modesto, Stockton-Lodi, Bakersfield, and Visalia-Tulare-Porterville.